

MÉLANGES

AN EARLY ANTHOLOGY OF MEDIEVAL LATIN POETRY

One of the earliest — if not the very first — of modern studies of medieval literature is the now rare volume of Polycarp Leyser, published in 1721. The full title is :

POLYCARPI LEYSERI, poes. prof. ord. in Acad. Helms-tadiensi, historia poetarum et poematum medii aevi decem, post annum a nato Christo ecce, seculorum | centum et amplius codicum m̄storum ope carmina varia elegantia, ingeniosa, curiosa, evulgantvr, emendantvr, recensentvr. HALAE MAGDEB. 1721.

8° Titula et praefatio pp. 16; Historia pp. 1-2132; Indices, pp. 16.

It should be noted that the pagination is faulty : the page-numbers leap from 1099 to 2000, although the Index gives references to the missing pages correctly, p. 1100 etc. The author includes over seven hundred poets, announcing his plan thus : *Poetas ordine chronologico locavi, initium faciens a seculo V et sequentia ad decimum quintum usque complexus... Specimina elegantiae adduxi aliqua ex editis scriptis. Inedita tota, nisi prolixiora, evulgavi.* The editor is very careful to quote his authorities; in addition to the early continental historians of literature, he gives frequent references to the English writers Leland, Bale, Pits, Wharton, Bernard, Smith, etc.

The author, Polycarp Leyser, was the fourth of that name, the other three, his father, his great-grandfather and his great-great-grandfather, all being notable theologians. Polycarp IV was born in 1690 near Hanover, had a brilliant career at various universities, became a doctor in the three faculties of philosophy, law and medicine, and at the age of 28 was appointed extraordinary professor of philosophy at Helmstädt, transferring in 1726 to the chair of history; his inaugural address was a discussion of the proposition : *Quod nihil sciatur, nisi quod historice scitur.* He died on April 7, 1728, at the early age of 37 years, 7 months.

Polycarp Leyser was a voluminous writer and probably killed himself with overwork. Between 1722 and 1727 he published no fewer than 30 books on legal and historical subjects, and he is rightly described as « polyhistor »; in 1719 was issued a *Conspectus scriptorum editorum et edendorum a Polycarpo Lysero*, an amazing work in both its performance and its promise. His labours in legal history can best be studied in the *Opuscula quibus jurisprudentia, historia et ars diplomatica illustratur*, published at Nuremberg in 1800; a small selection from his literary and historical writings can be seen in the *Amoenitatum litterarium reliquiae*, published at Leipzig in 1729. But it is by his *Historia poetarum et poematum medii aevi* that Leyser's fame will live longest. At a period when medieval literary studies were in their infancy, he saw the importance of the field and the necessity for adequately edited texts, and his untiring labours on manuscript sources leave one in amazement at the amount of reading and transcription he carried through amid so many other interests, and no less at the sureness of touch and the excellence of judgment he displayed in his editing. There is truth in the remark that, with his Helmstädt colleague von der Hardt and Hardouin, he is one of the great triumvirate of seventeenth century scholars. I hope later to return to the book itself and to say something of its contents and its methods. For the present it may suffice to quote the concluding sentences of his life in the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Bd. XVIII, p. 528): « Es ist ein Quellenwerk ersten Ranges und noch jetzt das einzige seiner Art. Da seitdem sehr zahlreiche lateinische mittelalterliche Gedichte im Druck erschienen sind (Dümmler, Du Méril, u. s. w.), so war eine neue Bearbeitung des Leyser'schen Werkes längst ein Wunsch der gelehrten Welt; es wollte auch ein bedeutender deutscher Buchhändler eine solche liefern, er hat aber trotz vielfacher Umfragen noch keinen Gelehrten gefunden, der sich einer so schwierigen und umfangreichen Aufgabe unterziehen wollte. » But surely the case is different now.

J. H. BAXTER.
